

The Way of the Future

The role of security cooperation in facing 21st century threats

by Mark Nakhla & LtCol Chris Jackson

“We made friends for life.”¹ That was how LtCol Jeffrey Miller described

the Marine Corps’ recent participation in a security cooperation exchange with the Ugandan military. The Ugandan People’s Defense Force was seeking to develop a counterimprovised explosive device (CIED) program of instruction to provide critical training to Ugandan soldiers prior to their deployment to support the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM), which was established to monitor the ceasefire in Mogadishu after the 1991 civil war. Through the support of the Marine Corps’ Security Cooperation Education and Training Center (SCETC) in Quantico, LtCol Miller traveled to Uganda, a landlocked country in Eastern Africa, in May 2010 to discuss with the Ugandan military how the Marine Corps develops its CIED training. This exchange is a real-world example of security cooperation that has had, and will have, a long-term direct impact on our national security interests. By helping Ugandan soldiers in UNOSOM receive the requisite information regarding CIED operations, the Marine Corps was directly helping an ally develop a training curriculum that would help them train soldiers long into the future.

A New Threat Environment

Today our country faces a variety of complex threats that are complicated by an uncertain global environment. The current security environment and the global balance of power have changed from the 1980s and 1990s.

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We face security threats from violent extremists who harbor an ideology that threatens to overthrow the international system and from irregular challenges that emanate from states that cannot secure their borders or control their territories.² Our global partners and allies share these threats, and to address them we require broader engagements and growing partnerships. Addressing these new and emerging challenges presents not only greater responsibilities, but also opportunities that, if capitalized on, will contribute to securing the U.S. homeland and maintaining our vital strategic and security interests abroad.

Adapting to emerging threats and to a changing global environment is nothing new to the Marine Corps. In 1920, at the conclusion of World War I, the Marine Corps, led by Gen John A. Lejeune and forward thinkers like LtCol Earl “Pete” Ellis, transformed itself from a Military Service that protected naval bases, augmented ships

companies, and conducted amphibious raids into an amphibious force that would later become integral to winning the Pacific War. The genesis of this transformation was the Department of the Navy and the Marine Corps’ belief that Japan was to become the primary threat to U.S. national security interests. Those visionaries foresaw World War II, changed the mission and tasks of the Corps, and developed new Service capabilities. Today, again in the face of new and uncertain security threats, the Marine Corps must adapt to respond to future threats before they arise. We must rebalance to try to prevent future contingencies through engagements with partner-nation forces, but we must also maintain capabilities across the range of military operations. This approach is not only more fiscally sustainable, but it is also a more effective way to address current and future threats before they arise.

A major component of U.S. security interests is global cooperation and en-

“For the foreseeable future, the strategic environment will be defined by a global struggle against a violent extremist ideology that seeks to overturn the international state system.”

—Marine Corps Service Campaign Plan 2009–2015

agement with partners to produce regional and global security. Our national interests, as stated in the recently published *2010 National Security Strategy*, are (1) the security of the United States, its allies, and partners; (2) the validity of the domestic and global economy; (3) the promotion of universal values; and (4) the maintenance of an international order advanced by U.S. leadership that promotes a stable, secure, and cooperative world order through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges.³ Security cooperation, including its subsets security assistance and security force assistance, is a means by which we advance these vital interests. By shaping the strategic environment toward deterring major conflicts, precluding major instability from arising, enhancing the military capacity of partner nations, and preparing for contingencies as they arise, security cooperation capitalizes on the opportunities presented by the security threats and challenges our Nation and partners face today and in the future.⁴

As *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025* states:

... today's Marines are performing superbly in contingency operations in Afghanistan, and elsewhere, but the Marine Corps as an institution must devote more of its attention to tomorrow's threats.⁵

The Marine Corps will be asked to deploy to support engagement and security cooperation activities as forces become available from current contingency operations, all while maintaining its core competencies of responding to crises and contingencies as they arise. In doing so, we recognize that it is far better to engage and proactively address security challenges rather than allow them to develop into crises or deteriorate into conflicts. Thus security cooperation is no longer a luxury or an implied task; rather, it is now a mission essential task that is critical to our long-term strategic interests. With that in mind, the question then must be asked, should security cooperation be considered a core competency of the Marine Corps?

Shaping the Operational Environment

There has been a shift in U.S. strategic emphasis in recent years toward developing and employing new, balanced capabilities. To accomplish the national security objectives the United States conducts "steady-state shaping" operations. These are activities that shape the overseas environ-

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ments for stability and set the conditions for success if contingency operations are necessary. Engaging with and building the capabilities and capacities of partner-nation forces is a means to that end.

Afghanistan. By working with local forces to develop their military capabilities for self-defense, security cooperation has been helping to build our bilateral defense and security relationships with those forces so that U.S. forces may have peacetime and contingency access in the future. Security cooperation activities include bilateral and multilateral training and exercises, formal training and education, personnel exchanges (military to military), providing or sharing information, providing air or sealift, and cooperative research and development.⁷ Security cooperation programs also include foreign military sales and efforts to assist foreign security forces in building competency and capacity. In almost all of the recent and upcoming strategic documents that guide the Marine Corps, security cooperation is highlighted as the way of the future.^{8 9}

Beginning in 2003 the Department of Defense (DoD) formalized interactions with foreign defense establishments with the intent of focusing on security cooperation activities as the best way to advance national interests and build

"It is our obligation to subsequent generations of Marines, and to our nation, to always have an eye to the future—to prepare for tomorrow's challenges today."

—Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025

Security cooperation is not a new concept or phenomenon, nor is it exclusive to steady-state shaping operations. Since before World War II the United States has been engaged in building the capacities of partner-nation forces.⁶ From Western Europe to Georgia, South Korea, and elsewhere in the Middle East and Latin America, security cooperation has contributed to building the institutional capacities and the operational capabilities of partner-nation forces. Even in recent years, security cooperation has been a part of the U.S. military's mission in Iraq and

partnerships for the future. The 2008 *Guidance for Employment of the Force (GEF)* introduced a new paradigm that transitioned DoD planning from a "contingency-centric" to a "strategy-centric" approach. In the past, combatant commands focused on contingency planning guidance primarily. Secondarily they focused on security cooperation guidance from the Secretary of Defense for operational planning. Now, with the *GEF*, combatant commanders focus on security cooperation and shaping activities to form the basis of their theater campaign plans, with contingencies as branches to

the base campaign plan.¹⁰ This new concept operationalizes security cooperation by providing a model for commanders to decide where to apply their resources in the most effective way. This paradigm shift requires new assessment and planning constructs. SCETC has been at the forefront of developing this capability for the Marine Corps by coordinating security cooperation activities from the Supporting Establishment and conducting comprehensive assessments and security cooperation engagement plans of partner-nation(s) security forces capabilities and capacities in support of the Marine component commands.

The new emphasis presented by the 2008 GEF has a twofold strategy. First, it takes an active, rather than reactive, approach to shaping the operational environment. Instead of waiting for contingencies to arise, the national emphasis that focuses on preventing major conflicts through active engagement and exchanges with partner-nation forces around the world has risen to a new level. Second, while this shift focuses on future contingencies, it also complements how the Marine Corps prepares for these contingencies. Security cooperation allows our forces to train, interact, and build relationships, as well as to build up the institutional and operational capabilities of partner-nation forces so that we have reliable partners to work with in the future.

The recently published *2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (2010 QDR)* also places security cooperation as a critical component to achieving our Nation's defense objectives. As outlined in the *2010 QDR*, our defense objectives are to prevail in today's wars, prevent and deter conflict, prepare to succeed in a wide range of contingencies, and preserve and enhance the force.¹¹ Recognizing the importance of this effort, the *2010 QDR* points to DoD's commitment to building the defense capacities of allied and partner states. Security cooperation touches on all of these objectives concurrently.

Looking Into the Future

The Marine Corps has been en-

"Security cooperation is defined as 'activities undertaken by the Department of Defense to encourage and enable international partners to work with the United States to achieve strategic objectives. It includes all DoD interactions with foreign defense and security establishments, including all DoD-administered security assistance programs, that: build defense and security relationships that promote specific U.S. security interests, including all international armaments cooperation activities and security assistance activities; develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self defense and multinational operations; and provide U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access to host nations.'"

—DoD Directive 5132.03, DoD Policy and Responsibilities Relating to Security

gaged in counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and is currently engaged in the same type of operations in Afghanistan. But, as we will eventually redeploy our combat forces from Afghanistan as we have already done in Iraq, we must maintain a focus on our future mission

and tasks. How do we transition from overseas contingency operations to Phase 0 then to steady-state shaping operations without disengaging from our partners and allies? Success in confronting tomorrow's global security challenges is directly linked to the sup-



We need to take an active approach to shape our potential operating environments. (Photo courtesy of authors.)

port provided by partner-nation forces. These forces understand the culture and know the terrain and the key players, as well as the major grievances of those who pose a threat to U.S. interests. This support is best advanced by engaging partner-nation forces to improve their capacities and capabilities to provide for their own security and to advance global stability.

Building partners' capacities is essential to continuing to "fight and win our Nation's battles" in the future and maintaining the Nation's defense in depth. Security cooperation allows the Marine Corps and the entirety of the U.S. military to attempt to prevent conflicts where we can, prepare for them where they may arise, and fight them if we must. Never before has security cooperation been as critical a mission as it is today. Partner nations must be able to fight and maintain their security and contribute to regional and global security, albeit at times with U.S. support and assistance. The quality of security cooperation plans and execution is critical to the long-term security interests of the United States.

Building Enduring Partnerships

Exchanges such as LtCol Miller's have a long-term strategic impact on our Nation's security interests and Marine Corps contingency planning. As LtCol Miller later described his experience, making the Ugandans more effective in CIED operations meant that the United States was providing assistance to UNOSOM without sending troops to do it themselves.¹² In assisting the Ugandan military to achieve the objectives of UNOSOM in Somalia, we assist in bringing security and stability to a nation that has been beset by internal conflict and ineffective governance. In doing so, not only do we undermine and undercut the potential for instability in Somalia by the presence of al-Qaeda and other extremist elements in that country, but we also advance the capabilities and capacities of Ugandan forces to secure their own boundaries and to be able to fight



Building partner's capabilities is essential. (Photo courtesy of authors.)

alongside our forces in future contingencies. This, and other similar security cooperation programs and activities, is the way the United States can ensure its security while simultaneously building enduring partnerships with allies around the world. Security cooperation is the way of advancing our security interests and ensuring the stability of our global interests into the future.

Notes

1. Author's interview with LtCol Jeffrey Miller, 28 June 2010.
2. Headquarters Marine Corps, Executive Summary, *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025*, Washington, DC, 2008, p. 2.
3. The White House, *National Security Strategy*, Washington, DC, May 2010, p. 7.
4. DoD, *GEF*, 2008, Washington, DC.
5. Executive Summary, *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025*, pp. 2–3.
6. Gates, Robert M., "Helping Others Defend Themselves: The Future of U.S. Security Assistance," *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, May/June 2010, p. 2.

7. DoD, *DoD 5105.38-M, Security Assistance Management Manual*, Washington, DC, October 2003.

8. *GEF*.

9. *Marine Corps Vision and Strategy 2025*, p. 18–52.

10. *GEF*.

11. DoD, Executive Summary, *2010 QDR*, Washington, DC, February 2010, pp. v–ix.

12. Miller interview.

>Author's Note: This article is the first in a series of articles on security cooperation principles, activities, and planning by SCETC, Training and Education Command. This and subsequent articles will focus on the security cooperation environment and how it is "operationalizing" the global engagement of the force and the associated paradigm shift from "contingency" to "strategy-centric" security cooperation planning.

